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GREAT LAKES FISHERIES

American fishermen harvest two-thirds of the 75,000 tons of fresh-water fish taken annually from the sixty-million acre Great Lakes water farm, according to Cyrus H. Chilton, Junior Marketing Agent, Division of Fishery Industries, writing in the latest issue of the Fishery Market News, published by the Fish and Wildlife Service, United States Department of the Interior.

For 1937 and 1938, for example, the total United States catch in the Great Lakes and the International Lakes of northern Minnesota averaged over 82.7 million pounds, valued at more than \$6,000,000 for each year. Lake Erie led all other Great Lakes in the production of fish, when the take is considered on a poundage basis. The fish caught in Lake Michigan, however, exceeded in value those obtained from the waters of Lake Erie. The difference in value is \$224,000, largely accounted for by the large yield of lake trout (one of the two most valuable fresh-water fishes) in Lake Michigan.

The species taken from these waters "contribute largely to the preferred fish trade," states Chilton, having had in 1938 "an average value per pound more than three times that of the average for the entire country."

There are about 32 species of fish and shellfish taken in the Great Lakes and marketed by United States fishermen. Top ten in importance, however, are lake trout, chubs, whitefish, lake herring, yellow perch, blue pike, yellow pike, carp, suckers, and cisco. Of the total 1938 production of the Great Lakes and International Lakes, these ten varieties represented approximately 90 percent by volume and 95 percent by value.

Because of the variation in size and diversity of conditions in these bodies of water, there is likewise marked variation in distribution of species in these waters. Thus, only three kinds comprise a significant portion of the catch of all of the lakes, namely, yellow perch, suckers, and whitefish. The whitefish is one of the most valuable of the commercial species. Lake trout, which requires deep waters for his abode, does not occur in commercial catches in either the International Lakes or Lake Erie. Blue and Yellow pike are taken from Lake Erie in large quantities. Lakes Erie and Ontario produce the only catch of cisco, while smelt is found in abundance as yet only in the Green Bay area of Lake Michigan, although they are gradually becoming more abundant in other parts of the lake and in Lakes Huron and Superior.

"Of considerable interest to the fishermen," says Chilton, "was the return of ciscoes to the eastern end of Lake Erie during the fall fishing season of 1938. The supply of this fish in Lake Erie had been considered by many to have become depleted for all time. After an unusually large catch in 1924 this species of fish disappeared almost entirely from the commercial catches in 1925. In 1924 the United States catch of ciscoes was 21,293,000 pounds, in 1925 it dropped to 2,817,000 pounds, and in 1928 was only 618,000 pounds. Thereafter, until 1938,

the catch never exceeded the 1928 figure and usually was about one hundred thousand pounds annually. In 1938 there was a sudden increase in the United States catch of cisco, resulting in a commercial harvest of 810,000 pounds. The recovery of the cisco fishery in 1938 was only temporary, for, although actual figures are not yet available, the total catch in 1939 was considerably below that of 1938."

Chilton's article, "Trends and Conditions of the United States Fisheries in the Great Lakes and International Lakes," is the most recent complete survey for the fisheries of the Great Lakes. It indicates that there were 6,976 commercial fishermen, 469 fishing vessels of 5 net tons and over, 1,662 small motor boats, and 1,659 other small boats engaged in fishing operations on the Great Lakes and International Lakes. The average annual production for these fishermen amounted to approximately 12,000 pounds for which they received an average of about seven and a half cents per pound. The annual average gross income per fisherman for this area was about \$900.

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